

AD-A283 414



NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.

WHERE THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY:  
UNDERSTANDING THE AMERICAN ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR


by

Thomas P. Gallagher  
CDR, USN

DTIC  
ELECTE  
AUG 17 1994  
S G D

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Operations Department.

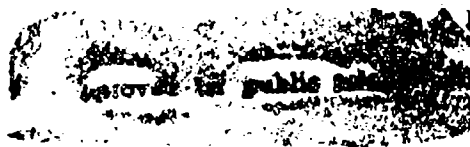
The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: 

17 June, 1994

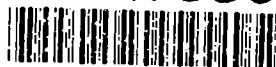
Paper directed by the Chairman, Operations Department.

Accession For	
NTIS CRA&I	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
DTIC TAB	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unannounced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Justification	
By	
Distribution/	
Availability Codes	
Dist	Avail and/or Special
A-1	



DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 1

94-25886



94 8 16 080

## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED		1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS	
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY		3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED	
2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE		5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)			
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT	6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable) C	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) NAVAL WAR COLLEGE NEWPORT, R.I. 02841		7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION	8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.
		TASK NO.	WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) WHERE THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY: UNDERSTANDING THE AMERICAN ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR (U)			
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) GALLAGHER, T.P., CDR, USN			
13a. TYPE OF REPORT FINAL	13b. TIME COVERED FROM TO	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 940617	15. PAGE COUNT 27
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.			
17. COSATI CODES		18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)			
<p>Throughout the history of the United States, US national will has been misunderstood and judged to be weak. The American domestic political tradition of criticism and dissension is often misinterpreted by foreign observers looking to take a measure of American foreign policies. Many of these observers mistakenly take American public opinion to be a reflection of the American public opinion to be a reflection of the American public's willingness to support foreign involvement. Foreign and domestic leaders need to understand and search out basic American public beliefs in order to find a true measure of the national spirit and willingness to sacrifice.</p> <p>Some foreign policy objectives are not worth the sacrifices asked of US</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CONTINUED ON BACK</p>			
20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION <i>Unclass</i>	
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL CHAIRMAN, OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT		22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) 841-3414	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL C

citizens. This does not reflect a lack of national resolve or a willingness to sacrifice. Sometimes these actions do not meet national interests.

Effective national leaders make their policy decisions carefully, understanding valid national interests in keeping with the character and beliefs of the American people. Public opinion is volatile and easily swayed. Public opinions are not public beliefs. It is important to recognize and understand the difference in order to gain a true measure of American national will.

When given articulate and visionary leadership, in the pursuit of objectives important to American interests and in keeping with American beliefs, US citizens consistently demonstrate a remarkable display of unity, steadfastness and, when required, violence.

## ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of the United States, US national will has been misunderstood and judged to be weak. The American domestic political tradition of criticism and dissension is often misinterpreted by foreign observers looking to take a measure of American foreign policies. Many of these observers mistakenly take American public opinion to be a reflection of the American public's willingness to support foreign involvement. Foreign and domestic leaders need to understand and search out basic American public beliefs in order to find a true measure of the national spirit and willingness to sacrifice.

Some foreign policy objectives are not worth the sacrifices asked of US citizens. This does not reflect a lack of national resolve or a willingness to sacrifice. Sometimes these actions do not meet national interests.

Effective national leaders make their policy decisions carefully, understanding valid national interests in keeping with the character and beliefs of the American people. Public opinion is volatile and easily swayed. Public opinions are not public beliefs. It is important to recognize and understand the difference in order to gain a true measure of American national will.

When given articulate and visionary leadership, in the pursuit of objectives important to American interests and in keeping with American beliefs, US citizens consistently demonstrate a remarkable display of unity, steadfastness and, when required, violence.

WHERE THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY:  
UNDERSTANDING THE AMERICAN ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR

INTRODUCTION

In the first of the many Indian Wars during the settling of New England, the Indian chief King Philip led his Wampanoag tribe against the English settlers near Narragansett Bay in the late 17th century. He thought that he could easily defeat the settlers and drive them out of the area. He failed. He was but the first in a long line stretching to Saddam Hussein of Iraq to assess the American population and "to mistake the peaceful man for a pacifist, and to confuse unreadiness for war with unwillingness to fight."<sup>1</sup>

Foreign observers tend to look to American public opinion, the media, or Congress for indications of the strength of US national will. The nature of democracy in the United States and the characteristics of her people have caused many people to underestimate the national will of Americans in times of real or potential conflict. Overlooked are fundamental public beliefs and national characteristics that are the true basis of understanding American attitudes towards foreign involvement.

As explained by Carl von Clausewitz in On War, a nation's power of resistance derives from the product of its total means and its strength of will. In measuring the power of an opponent, and just importantly one's own, "the extent of the means at his disposal is a matter - though not exclusively - of figures and should be measurable. But the strength of his will is much less

easy to determine and can only be gauged approximately by the strength of the motive animating it."<sup>2</sup>

Since World War II, the United States has seen little to challenge her means to conduct war. Most challengers have tried to attack the American national will and to create conditions that preclude American forces and decision makers from achieving policy aims. They attempt to attack what Clausewitz termed the "center of gravity." The center of gravity is based on the dominant characteristics of those involved in an attempt to target the source of legitimacy or strength. "Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed."<sup>3</sup>

In recent years it has become fashionable to state that the American "center of gravity" is its national will. Although this may be true, what is not true is the equally fashionable theory that American national will is weak and readily shaken, thereby preventing considered and extensive US involvement in conflict or in foreign affairs. Such involvement, it is opined, is especially short-lived if Americans are killed in the course of carrying out foreign policy.

In fact, the national will of the US consistently has proven to be strong and supportive of US foreign involvement. There is no lack of national will among the citizens of the US as a whole. When foreign, and sometimes domestic, leaders see a weak national will, they are really exhibiting their lack of understanding of

American character and institutions. These characteristics must be understood in order to assess correctly American willingness to support a given policy and to rally American support when required.

Yet, Americans do not suffer fools gladly. Proposed policies and resulting actions must be in the collective US national interest. National leaders should understand and articulate those national interests if they expect the American public to support their actions. History is replete with examples proving that the American public will support its leaders in the pursuit of common security, economic, or humanitarian/ideological interests, even to the point of major armed conflict.

#### DEFINING NATIONAL WILL

National will is an intangible commodity that may change with circumstances and over time. Clausewitz succinctly pointed out that the actions of nations in the pursuit of political objectives are governed by the value of that objective to the society and its leaders. Thus, "the value of this object must determine the sacrifice to be made for it in magnitude and also in duration. Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced...."

In other words, one definition of national will is the willingness to sacrifice in the pursuit of national interests. It is in determining the value of the objective that the national

leaders need to be careful, and it is there that the nature of American national will becomes a factor. There is a limit to a nation's willingness to sacrifice that has nothing to do with the ability to withstand difficult circumstances. The degree of sacrifice depends upon the need to attain or protect national interests, real or perceived. The people will not sacrifice unnecessarily or for objectives that do not meet national needs, however those needs are defined.

Some objects are worth only minimal sacrifice. Such a reevaluation of effort, of sacrifice, does not mean a loss of national will. It means that the national leadership miscalculated the necessity of attaining that political objective. National will, the strength of national character, may remain strong, yet view the sacrifice for a particular objective as unnecessary. In such a case, there is no weakness in national will, rather it is a misjudgment by national leaders in assessing the necessity of a particular course of action.

#### ASSESSING THE SOURCE OF NATIONAL WILL

It is not easy to determine what Americans consider to be worth the sacrifice, or even what they determine to be in their national interest. It takes considerable detective work on some issues to fit the overall value of the undertaking into the general fabric of American life. That there are mistakes or miscalculations should not be surprising. In pursuing policy options "disagreement is natural in view of the intrinsic



difficulties of threat perception in international affairs, conflicting appreciations of the values at stake, and different sets of emotions and attitudes."<sup>5</sup>

But, let there be no mistake. The American people are willing to defend those ideals that are important to them with startling unity, determination, and violence. Successful policy decisions are achieved when decision makers understand certain historical, character, institutional and belief patterns in the pursuit of articulated national interests. This does not mean reacting to the latest public opinion poll or latest fad. The American public want someone who can lead and set a realistic agenda in keeping with US national interests.

How, then, does one measure the national will of any nation, much less that of a diverse and complex society such as that of the United States? National will cannot be quantified in order to be measured or calculated directly. In the United States, neither public opinion, nor Congress, nor the media alone can reflect the true national will. Yet, often, these alone are used to support arguments that the national will does or does not exist. All three are necessary and important indicators of public support, but are not sufficient to gauge national will.

There is value in looking at public opinion, the media, and the Congress to determine the role that they do play in reflecting the national character and in influencing policy decisions that lead to US foreign involvement. The fact that these elements of the working American political system "share a

desire to preserve it, implies that they share other values and goals as well, such as concepts of right and wrong and fairness."<sup>6</sup>

#### THE PUBLIC

Democracy in the United States gains its legitimacy from the American public. Through the ballot box, the public exercises its control over elected officials and thereby influences their decisions. Through voting, the public controls the state by reacting to policy decisions. They approve those decisions they favor by returning elected officials to office, or show their disapproval by removing those officials from office.<sup>7</sup>

The impact on policy decisions is limited, however, by the timeliness of the general voting process. The only method for direct participation by the average citizen is through voting, but election procedures limit the influence of the citizen on a particular policy. As a result, there are lots of people and organizations (politicians, interest groups, etc.) that attempt to influence particular decisions by "interpreting" what the masses want.

The lack of influence and direct participation is even more acute in the case of foreign policy, where decisions can lead directly, or indirectly to war. The last formal US declaration of war, the Constitutional method for involving American citizens in conflict, took place on 8 December, 1941. More to the point, Americans do not vote based on issues facing the nation in the

foreign arena. National elections would seem to include issues of importance to the nation, but foreign affairs do not have a significant effect on the outcome of elections. More "interpretation" of the desires of the nation is required because there is little-to-no direction from the voters to national leaders in the area of foreign policy. "There has never been a national election that was a clear plebiscite on an issue of foreign policy."

Politicians respond, however, to the perceived needs of the people in an effort to be reelected. They know that even if the connection between foreign affairs and the voter is tenuous, still public support is essential to successfully carry out a policy. How then to gauge public support and to know that it supports particular policy decisions? There is an element of "the cart and the horse" to the question. US leaders take public opinion seriously, even if the voters themselves do not. Consequently, national leaders tend to "treat national security policy as a commodity to be sold rather than as a set of inescapably controversial ideas to be debated and understood."

With such a significant difference in perception between the legitimacy of democratic government based on participation, and the real ability or interest of the electorate to impact decisions, there are difficulties in supplying meaningful input when decisions are made that capture the interest of the population. Massive protests generally arise only when the public feels excluded from the process following decisions that

elicit feelings of peril or outrage. Generally, this is only when things seem to be going badly. The voters then react in the only way available to them, by putting pressure on the policymakers.<sup>10</sup> However, their desire to influence decisions in such a matter does not mean that the demonstrations reflect a loss of national will.

To preclude negative reactions, increased participation on the part of the public is required. For the reasons outlined above, this is difficult to do. A basic understanding of American attitudes enables leaders to rally public support for important policy decisions.

It is important to make a distinction between public support and public opinion. American public opinion is not automatically a reflection of the American national character nor a reflection of its national will to endure tough times. A closer look at the nature of American public opinion points out such fundamental differences, and thereby provides a means to avoid the pitfalls in trying to measure US national will.

Analysts divide the public and their opinions towards foreign policy into three categories: the opinion leaders; the attentive public; and the mass public.<sup>11</sup> Depending on the study, 70-80% of American citizens fall into the latter category. The mass public does not have an interest or a particular opinion about foreign issues. Such issues are viewed as vague, remote, and complicated.<sup>12</sup> However, few Americans will not express an opinion. When pressed by pollsters, members of the mass public

will oblige by providing their opinion at the moment. Such opinions are easily changeable, leading some observers to their conclusions that Americans have a weak national will. It is important to remember that public opinion is not a true measure of national will, nor does it reflect the deep seated values and character of the American people. Public opinion is volatile. Public beliefs are not. It is the latter that determines the staying power of the American public.

Popular opinion equals popular values, but not policy options or fundamental societal values, or public beliefs. There is a significant difference between public opinion, which is often volatile, confused and ill-informed, and public beliefs. Public beliefs reflect a considered second judgement of the issue and reflect trade-offs and a willingness to accept responsibility. Public beliefs are steady and vary little over time. Public opinion can change daily and is easily influenced."

Although the average citizen seems to have little interest, preferring to leave foreign policy to the "experts," it is false to assume that the average citizen does not get the big picture. Most people may ignore or misunderstand the nuances of foreign affairs, but they generally understand the context of decisions with respect to deep-seated American beliefs. As the impact on the average American changes, their interest level changes. That is, with the use of US military forces, or with a direct challenge to US economic interests, or with a clear vision of the

need to defend American honor and ideals, the interest of the mass public increases.<sup>14</sup>

Much of the public's response to war issues is influenced by the position taken by the leaders of the political parties, the "experts." Many Americans use political parties as a shortcut for a position on an issue. They tend to take their cues from the party leaders, rather than to investigate the issue and decide for themselves.<sup>15</sup> Vocal opponents or proponents of particular policies are not viewed as experts. Those who are most vocal on particular issues reflect the narrow interests of a pressure group. Likewise, vocal opinions should not be mistaken as representative of the general public. Often they neither influence, nor reflect mass support for political decisions. There is a significant gap between the protesting elites, and the masses that they think that they represent. Public opinion may remain unchanged by the actions of the vocal opposition,<sup>16</sup> certainly public beliefs remain unchanged.

#### THE MEDIA

Similar misperceptions in dealing with the mass public exist in trying to look to the media as a judge of national will. The media is more often a reflection of public opinion than of public beliefs. Sometimes it helps to influence the formation of public opinion. It does not form or change public beliefs. Indeed, the media tends to reinforce existing public beliefs.

Still, the media cannot be totally overlooked as it remains

as a significant element of the policy process. Often the media acts like the general public, taking its cue from the positions of the established political parties and reflecting the views of party leaders.<sup>17</sup> If there is bipartisan support for national action in times of crisis, then the media tends to support it. If there is opposition, or serious debate on a policy or course of action, then that is reflected in media coverage.

Sometimes prolonged debates undermine the policy process, preventing coherent policy formulations and timely reactions to events. Such activity also helps to perpetuate misunderstandings by foreign observers trying to gauge the depth of American public support. It is through media coverage that much of the outside world watches the American political process at work, complete with dissent and criticism of nearly every major initiative. Here again, the American process is mistaken for the character of its people, leading to miscalculation by those outside the country that would try to take advantage of a seemingly divided US. Public opinion, reflected in the domestic political process, is mistaken for public beliefs.

National crises can vary in intensity, importance, or perceived value, to the nation and its security. Each may reflect a different degree of seriousness, and in each the media reflects the actions of the political leaders and the concerns of the nation as a whole. In the most serious of crises, the acute crisis, there is a suspension of political, and consequently, media opposition to national leaders. The nation rallies to

support the President and his advisers. Not surprisingly, in the least serious crises the debate continues, opposition to proposed or past policies may be voiced, and reflections of the domestic political conflict appear in the media.<sup>18</sup>

The media reflects the events of the time, rather than creating them. Judging national will through a survey of press and television reports is misleading, just as using public opinion to measure national will is misleading. National beliefs and character are what is important, not media reports on changing public opinion.

#### THE CONGRESS

What then is the role of Congress? Do its members better reflect national beliefs, or is studying the position of political leaders little better in judging national will than was public opinion and the media?

Congress plays a role in shaping decisions that could lead to armed conflict. After all, according to the Constitution, Congressional action is required to declare war. Likewise, the Senate is tasked to "advise and consent" to treaties and other foreign obligations entered into by the Executive Branch.

More recently, Congress has attempted to reassert its role through enactment of the War Powers Act. Although of little direct value to date in controlling Presidential use of armed forces, it has caused the President to consider fully his actions before committing armed forces abroad. Most importantly, it has



caused the Executive Branch to try and build a consensus through bipartisan support of actions in order to preclude a political showdown in times of crisis.<sup>19</sup>

Bipartisan support for policy decisions is most important to the perception and reality of a solid national will. In studying recent large scale uses of US armed forces in conflict (Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf), the impact differing domestic political viewpoints has on foreign commitments is readily apparent. The two "unpopular" wars, Korea and Vietnam, became that way only after they became important in the give and take of domestic partisan politics.<sup>20</sup> When the bipartisan support continued, there was general support for American involvement. In both cases a Democratic president was replaced during the war with a Republican challenger that promised an end to the war.

In the Gulf War, following much testing of the political winds, the Congress voted in a bipartisan way to support the President in the desert. The Gulf War proved to be a "popular" war. This trend reinforces the earlier observation that many in the mass public look to the leaders of their political parties to determine a position on foreign and defense issues.

In reality, of course, it can be quite difficult to build the required consensus of support from both political parties. This is especially true in election years when the primacy of domestic issues leads those seeking national political office to seek out issues with which to differentiate themselves from the incumbents. Foreign issues provide a way to challenge domestic

political opponents without challenging the fundamental beliefs of the population. The nature of the American political system, with many diverse interest groups and corresponding centers of power, coupled with the long held and steadfast beliefs of the people "makes the building of the kind of consensus necessary for positive action a formidable task."<sup>21</sup>

It is the nature of democracies, especially the United States, to be reactive in dealing with foreign problems. It is very difficult to build a consensus except in times of danger to the nation and its beliefs. Few "proactive" endeavors are undertaken. "If political pluralism leads constitutionally, organizationally, and bureaucratically to the fragmentation of the decisional process and structure, the inevitable result is to limit severely the prospect for a coherent and cohesive national security strategy."<sup>22</sup> This is very frustrating to military and diplomatic professionals and adds to the perception that the United States lacks the will to stick with a course of action.

Foreign policy decisions cannot be viewed as objective reactions to a set of given conditions. Rather, US foreign involvement is "conditioned by culturally imposed qualities of character" that "strongly influence perception, selection and evaluation of political reality."<sup>23</sup> The national will is better reflected through the American strategic culture, its public beliefs, gut-values, and national character.

#### THE AMERICAN STRATEGIC CULTURE

Americans generally do not like to think that they fit the Clausewitzian paradigm of international affairs whereby war is merely politics by other means. The implication that the "end justifies the means" does not sit well with the average US citizen. National leaders like to think that they view world affairs in Clausewitzian terms, but Americans do not view war as an instrument of policy. Americans tend to think in more humanistic terms. If men are rational, then they should be able to arrive at rational decisions and achieve peaceable solutions to problems.<sup>24</sup>

The American approach to international problems has more to do with principles than with goals. Whatever the objective, the means of attaining the objective is limited by moral principles. These principles are founded in codes such as standards of conduct, international law, the United Nations Charter, and other moral foundations. This approach allows some types of action, but not others, and the permissible actions may be unrelated to the goal which the US is striving to achieve.<sup>25</sup>

This American moralistic/legalistic approach to foreign policy, and to war, sometimes results in actions whereby the United States sticks to its principles at the expense of the overall policy goal. This tendency baffles our allies and enemies alike, because it makes the US appear to be responsible and irresponsible at the same time. "A momentary rift in the clouds brings the irresponsible trends to the surface; an intensification of threat brings out a sober readiness to

sacrifice."<sup>26</sup>

The US approach is "superficially flexible because of its pragmatic character, but basically rigid because its vague beliefs are static rather than dynamic."<sup>27</sup> In pursuing a principled approach to world involvement, Americans worry about foreign ingratitude and perceptions of the US as a "soft touch." "If the aim is understood to be American security, then friendliness and gratitude are welcome, but not essential responses. But if the aim is viewed as humanitarian, and rejection and unfriendliness are forthcoming, then the existing minority opposition [within the US] to the various...programs may come to be supported by a general revulsion of feeling."<sup>28</sup> Americans are exceedingly generous, but need constant assurances that their contributions of wealth and effort are being well-used and properly appreciated. Indications that either are not taking place provides support for domestic political opponents to criticize the incumbent leaders.

As a result, justifications for policy decisions constantly waiver between "security needs" and "humanitarian concerns." The tendency is to add a moral flavor to actions motivated by expediency and to add an expedient flavor to actions really motivated by moral or humanitarian values.<sup>29</sup>

Gabriel Almond in The American People and Foreign Policy, captured the essence of the US strategic culture in six categories or characteristics. These are: withdrawal-intervention; mood-simplification; optimism-pessimism; tolerance-

intolerance; idealism-cynicism; superiority-inferiority.<sup>30</sup>

The dilemma of "withdrawal-intervention" is easily viewed in the cyclical history of US isolationist and interventionist policies. This cycle is prevalent in general tendencies over time, but also within certain time frames from issue to issue. There are two serious dangers when questions of foreign involvement arise. The first is a tendency to overreact to a threat (war fever when US security is not at stake). The second is the tendency to overreact in times of relative equilibrium and peace (immediate calls for reductions in the armed forces and domestic issues dominate policy decisions.)

"Mood-simplification" results in skepticism, apathy and a lack of focus when there is no immediate or clearly defined threat. With the advent of a crisis, the mood swings drastically to focus the issue and leads to oversimplification of the threat and the means to cope with it. Usually, the problem is viewed in terms of the belief in the rational man and his inherent ability to improvise a simple solution. This characteristic contributes to American views of "winning" wars via unconditional surrender in an attempt to resolve complex problems. During the cold war this outlook contributed to the tendency to make an ally out of any nation or leader that was anti-Communist.

"Optimism-pessimism" reflects the disillusionment caused by American involvement guided by moral principles that clash with the reality of world politics. Efforts based on good-will, common sense, and improvisation of simple answers sets American

efforts up for failure with respect to more pragmatic and goal oriented players in the world arena. US failures lead to withdrawal reactions ("they don't play fair, so we'll take our ball and go home"), or hasty actions based on irritation or impatience ("take it or leave it"). Failure results in short-sighted policies that lead to a pessimistic "writing-off" of the undertaking.

"Tolerance-intolerance" reflects the national tendency to want to try new things, but only as part of a majority. Americans exhibit an outward flexibility in attitudes, but are intolerant of views that do not match national beliefs. The result is a kind of "ideological imperialism" that is offensive to other cultures and political systems.

"Idealism-cynicism" (sometimes referred to as moral dualism) reflects ambivalent American attitudes between doing what is motivated by self-interests and what is motivated by selflessness. Americans want undertakings to be good for business or for security, and to look good, too. Embarrassed that good-will or generosity may appear to be the result of a "soft touch," actions must have a cover of self-interest. Yet, Americans are also embarrassed by taking actions that purely satisfy self-interests. There is a conflict between what is perceived to be "right" and the realities of self-preservation.

"Superiority-inferiority" prevents a balanced approach to dealing with other cultures. Americans tend to both over and under estimate their skills and virtues with respect to other

nations. They tend to keep a "scoreboard," comparing what is good and bad in others and themselves. For example, Americans believe in the superiority of their ideals, but not of their artistic culture. The result is an imbalanced approach in dealing with other nations.

It is not surprising that "it is easy for governments, bureaucrats, elites, and larger publics to disagree on matters of threat perception."<sup>11</sup> Even when the threat is clear and well-understood, Americans are ambivalent about their approach to war.

#### NATIONAL WILL AND WAR

Americans tend to be extremists on war. They either avoid it or pursue it wholeheartedly. This characteristic is not as contradictory as it may appear. The American approach to war is to embark upon a crusade.<sup>12</sup> Americans do not fight for particular goals, but for general principles such as "democracy," "free seas," or "self-determination." Coupled with the six characteristics above, it should not be surprising that American foreign involvement tends to be cyclical, swinging from one extreme of involvement to the other. American views that nations should not enter wars except to "win" via unconditional surrender fits naturally with a crusaders approach to war. Unfortunately, ideological war aims are seldom achieved. American disillusionment follows with the realization that conflict does not achieve such lofty, and perhaps unattainable, aims.<sup>13</sup>

American ambivalence towards war is further complicated by

the general view of the proper composition of US armed forces. The enriched tradition of the citizen army carried over from colonial days is deeply rooted in the American view of democracy. Defense of the nation is considered the responsibility of every citizen, and the armed forces of a democratic nation must have a democratic military force. Additionally, standing military forces should be used to further other socially desirable objectives. But large standing forces are viewed with suspicion as they are considered unnecessary and not in the American tradition. Historically, large standing forces are perceived as a threat to domestic economic prosperity and as a potential threat to peace.<sup>34</sup> The American model of the citizen army also serves to perpetuate the ideals of innovation, simple solutions, principled conflict, and the belief that "good old American know-how" will triumph in the end.

In such a societal and historical context, the Weinberger Doctrine is nothing new. Its six criteria<sup>35</sup> for US military intervention serves to articulate the American view of armed conflict and defines what Americans have always expected of their national leaders.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The American view of its armed forces and their use, coupled with the limitations and nature of US democracy, makes it difficult to pursue a coherent foreign and national security policy. It is a stern test of US national leaders and only those



that fully understand the nature of the game in the US will pass. It is a particularly difficult situation when dealing with limited wars or "low intensity conflict." The American nature is to play to "win." Conflicts that do not have total defeat of the enemy as the objective are considered to be "too political." There is little understanding of the Clausewitzian principle that not every war leads to a final solution of complex problems. Immediate criticism is leveled at the national leadership, forgetting that "when people talk, as they often do, about harmful political influence on the management of war, they are not really saying what they mean. Their quarrel should be with the policy itself, not with its influence. If the policy is right -- that is, successful -- any intentional effect it has on the conduct of the war can only be to the good. If it has the opposite effect the policy itself is wrong."<sup>36</sup>

To be effective in leading the US in the world arena, all avenues of US efforts, including armed conflict, must conform to an articulated vision that reflects American public beliefs and values. National leaders must be less concerned with domestic ideological struggles and symbolic political victories. They need to take a pragmatic, problem-solving approach under bipartisan leadership.<sup>37</sup> In so doing, the policy will be correct and in accord with American national interests.

National leaders must be willing to persevere in the pursuit of national interests without overlooking the obvious facts as a situation changes or fails to support the national good. As with

the military commander's axiom that "the first report is always wrong," so too should the national political leader remember that axiom in dealing with public opinion. Public opinion will change, often dramatically, as situations unfold. National leaders must be able to look past public opinion and fit their policies into the overall scheme of public beliefs. They then must measure continually and consistently the development of the policy with respect to public beliefs.

The American people will stick with their leaders and support their armed forces abroad. Throughout history they have continually demonstrated their resolve, much to the disappointment of those who would seek to achieve their own interests at the end of a gun.

Questioning leaders and their policies is part of the American process of democracy. Many outside the US mistake the American privilege of dissent and criticism, even in war, as a sign of weakness and take the opponents of national decisions as the "true voice" of the American people."

The questions that the public and their representatives raise are legitimate and our leaders must listen to them. In so doing, they must provide clear, articulate, visionary answers, and not give in to the facile answer of the day. When they find answers that fit with American public beliefs, the American people will demonstrate their resolve, strength of character, and firm national will.

## ENDNOTES

1. Robert Leckie, The Wars of America (Updated Version) (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), p. 10.
2. Carl von Clausewitz, On War. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 77.
3. Ibid., p. 595.
4. Ibid., p. 92.
5. Klaus Knorr, "Threat Perception," Klaus Knorr, ed. Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems, (Lawrence Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1976), p. 85.
6. Roger Hilsman, The Politics of Policymaking in Defense and Foreign Affairs: Conceptual Models and Bureaucratic Politics, Third Edition, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1993), p. 80.
7. D.A. Lake, "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War," American Political Science Review, March 1992, p.26.
8. Richard J. Barnet, The Rocket's Red Glare: When America Goes to War: The Presidents and the People, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 13.
9. Ibid., p.400.
10. Ibid., p.407.
11. Ibid., p.12.
12. John E. Mueller, War, Presidents and Public Opinion (New York: Wiley Press, 1973), p. 2.
13. Barnet, p. 403.
14. Ibid., p.18.
15. Mueller, p.116.
16. Ibid., p.266.
17. Brigitte Lebons Nacos, The Press, Presidents and Crises, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 183.
18. Ibid., p. 9.

19. Hilsman, p.346.
20. Mueller, p. 34.
21. Hilsman, p. 348.
22. Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr. "National Security Decision Making: Policy Implications," Robert L. Pfaltzgraff and Uri Ra'anan, eds. National Security Policy: The Decision-making Process, (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1984), p. 291.
23. Gabriel A. Almond, The American People and Foreign Policy, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1960), p. 29.
24. Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and The State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations, (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p. 151.
25. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington, Political Power: USA/USSR, (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), p. 64.
26. Almond, p. 67.
27. Brzezinski and Huntington, p. 66.
28. Almond, p.28. ;
29. Ibid., p. 52
30. Almond, pp. 54 - 63. Much of the following discussion of the US strategic culture is drawn from this seminal work, except as noted. Many later researchers and analysts based their work on the initial conclusions drawn by Almond.
31. Knorr, p.85.
32. Huntington, p. 152.
33. Ibid.
34. Huntington, pp. 156 - 157.
35. The six criteria paraphrased below were presented in a speech by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger on 28 October, 1984 at the National Press Club. The contents of the speech were reported in all major media sources the following day. The criteria are:
  1. Any use of force must be predicated upon a matter deemed as a vital US national interest.
  2. The commitment of forces must be made with a clear intention of winning.
  3. The action must support clearly defined political and

military objectives.

4. The forces committed must be sufficient to meet the objective.

5. There must be a reasonable assurance of the support of the American people.

6. The commitment of US forces to combat must be a measure of the last resort.

36. Clausewitz, p. 608.

37. R. B. Levering, "Public Opinion, Foreign Policy, and American Politics Since the 1960's," Diplomatic History, Summer 1989, p. 392.

38. Leckie, p. 1120.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Almond, Gabriel A. The American People and Foreign Policy. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1960.
- Barnet, Richard J. The Rocket's Red Glare: When America Goes to War; The Presidents and the People. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990.
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew and Huntington, Samuel P. Political Power: USA/USSR. New York: The Viking Press, 1965.
- Clausewitz, Carl von. On War. Howard, Michael and Paret, Peter, eds. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Hilsman, Roger. The Politics of Policymaking in Defense and Foreign Affairs: Conceptual Models and Bureaucratic Politics, Third Edition. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993.
- Huntington, Samuel P. The Soldier and The State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations. New York: Vintage Books, 1957.
- Knorr, Klaus, ed. Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1976.
- Leckie, Robert. The Wars of America. (Updated Version). New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.
- Levering, R.B. "Public Opinion, Foreign Policy, and American Politics Since the 1960's." Diplomatic History, Summer 1989, pp. 383-393.
- Lake, D.A. "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War." American Political Science Review, March 1992, pp. 24-37.
- Mueller, John E. War, Presidents and Public Opinion. New York: Wiley Press, 1973.
- Nacos, Brigitte Lebons. The Press, Presidents and Crises. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Pfaltzgraff, Robert L. and Ra'anan, Uri, eds. National Security Policy: The Decision-making Process. Hamden Connecticut: Archon Books, 1984.